



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approves funding reauthorization to complete veteran housing initiative

MONTEZUMA CREEK, Utah – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee considered Legislation No. 0258-17, which seeks to continue to utilize any unexpended funds to complete the housing initiative for the Veteran Housing Program by extending their exemption from the lapsing requirement until the end of FY2018.

In Sept. 2013, the Navajo Nation Council approved resolution CS-48-13, which amended the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund to construct 15 homes and provide minor home renovations in each of the five Navajo agencies for four years, which began in FY2013 and is set to end at the close of FY2017 on Sept. 30.

The Veteran Housing Program is funded by a set-aside from the Navajo Nation General Fund that is generated from all revenues on the Nation and is diverted to the Veterans Trust Fund annually in the amount of four-percent, in which two-percent is allocated to the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration and two-percent to the Veteran Housing Program.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') said that the legislation is an effort to continue to commit resources to complete the veteran housing initiative to ensure that the selected veterans in most need receive their homes.

"I was given resolutions from Fort Defiance and Northern Agency Veterans Organizations requesting reauthorization of the veteran's housing funds. These funds have been tied up and have not been expended due to circumstances outside the control of individual veterans," said Delegate Begay.

Delegate Begay said he truly hopes that with the reauthorization of the funds, it would be utilized for veterans who are in dire need of immediate housing, and added, "every Navajo family has a veteran and it only makes sense to help."

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) stated that there are no housing policies regarding the management and care for the homes, and said that there is a lack of adequate housing codes that is supposed to ensure safety and accountability.

“We all assume that the Navajo Nation has housing policies, but when you involve lawyers, they will say that there is nothing that covers the Nation to confirm that the houses were built correctly. Attorneys will point out the housing codes and say there is nothing we can do about it. This may hurt our veterans in the long run,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale stressed to the NNVA that they need to clarify their housing policies and codes, and recommended a corrective action plan to address potential concerns for the housing program.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to approve Legislation No. 0258-17, and moves forward to the Budget and Finance Committee for consideration. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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